

Testimony before the Judiciary Committee

Re: HB6684

April 15, 2013

Good morning/afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Judiciary committee. My name is Paul Acker, co-chair of the Keep the Promise Adult Committee and coordinator of social rehabilitation at InterCommunity and a person in recovery.

I am here to support House Bill 6684, An Act Concerning the Establishment of an Intake, Referral and Intervention System Relating to the Provision and Delivery of Mental Health Services.

Keep the Promise supports the coordination of services between Probate courts and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and hopes that it will stem the revolving door that is frustrating some judges. The idea of having DMHAS and peer supports in place early in the process rather than later in the process is appealing because it's a form of engagement that is under-utilized. A similar model in some capacity is used currently in criminal courts (jail diversion).

I whole heartedly support the increased use of peer supports as outlined in the Peer Bridger section of the bill. A trained peer has a means of connecting to a person experiencing psychiatric distress that traditional providers do not. Having a peer establish a peer relationship early on in the process and supporting the person throughout their treatment is key. It has been shown to reduce hospitalizations in Tennessee and Wisconsin by 71% and 44% respectively.

Respite services are another affordable way that we can offer help to as an alternative to expensive emergency room use and hospitalizations. The expansion of these services can not only offer a person an alternative when needed, but it would also save the State money in these tough economic times.

I also would like to encourage the usage of Advanced Directives so that when its deemed that a person cannot make decisions for themselves, the document would have already designated a health care representative of their choice, chosen when the person is feeling well. The document also specifies treatments and medications that work for the person (as well as those that don't), saving

valuable time in creating a working relationship between the provider and the person receiving services.

In closing, I would like to encourage the Judiciary Committee to support HB6684 as a way of working with people instead of forcing treatment upon them. The more we work on building partnerships and respecting people's choices, the better off we all are. Thank you for your time.